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L E T T E R

OF THE

MONTREAL HARBOUR COMMISSIONERS,

TO THE

HON. THOMAS J. J. LORANGER, M.P.P.,
Provincial Secretary, &c., &c.,

ON THE PROPOSED

I M P R O V E M E N T S

IN THE

HARBOUR OF MONTREAL.

Montreal :

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LETTER
OF
THE MONTREAL HARBOUR COMMISSIONERS.

HARBOUR OFFICE,
Montreal, 26th June, 1858.

THE HON. THOMAS J. J. LORANGER, M.P.P.,
Provincial Secretary.

SIR,—A Petition, numerously signed by citizens of Montreal, has been printed in the city papers, and will no doubt soon be presented to the three Branches of the Legislature, against the Bill recently introduced into the Legislature, entitled, "An Act to provide for the further improvement of the Harbour of Montreal." The vast importance of the subject of improving the Harbour, will be a sufficient reason for bringing under the notice of the Government the views of the Harbour Commissioners on the matters referred to in the Petition. It will be evident also, from a glance at the Petition, that it is so drawn up, as to reflect, to some extent, upon the conduct and management of the important works under the charge of the Harbour Commissioners, and also as to their conduct in relation to the Bill in question. The Commissioners think it their duty, therefore, to state the real facts of the case, as the best means of enabling the Legislature and the public to judge in relation to their conduct in pressing forward the improvements which they consider so much needed, and which are likely to be retarded by the erroneous views and statements expressed by the framers of the Petition.

It is unnecessary to say much now, as to the necessity of increased accommodation for vessels in the Harbour of Montreal, or to vindicate the strenuous efforts made by the Commissioners to bring the subject fully before the public. But a glance at what has been already accomplished by them, will serve to enable the Government and the public the better to judge of the necessity and propriety of the works which the Commissioners have urged forward for Harbour Improvements.

In 1843 the Government commenced, what the Commissioners think they are justified in considering, one of the greatest and most useful of the Public Works of the Province,—the deepening of Lake St. Peter, and the improvement of the River navigation between Quebec and Montreal. The work was carried on until 1847, when, for reasons that it is unnecessary now to mention, the work was abandoned.

In 1850, the Harbour Commissioners, impressed with the importance of these improvements, and impressed also with a full sense of the difficulties to be overcome in connexion with them, asked the Government for power to carry on these improvements. This power was granted, and the necessary legislative provisions made. In two years the Channel of Lake St. Peter was deepened to an extent of two feet more than in the old channel. In three years more it was further deepened, so as to give five feet more water than in the old channel; and the Commissioners expect this summer to prove that its capacity is increased to seven feet in depth over the old channel. The magnitude of the work will be seen, when it is considered that the deepening extends over a distance of eighty miles, and dredging has actually been done over twenty-four miles, the width of the channel dredged being nowhere less than 300 feet, and that about 4,250,000 cubic yards of excavation have been removed from the bed of the Lake and River, and carried off and dropped at distances averaging more than a mile.

These results are adverted to as the best proof of the correctness of the views entertained by the Commissioners, of the necessity and propriety of improvements being made in the Harbour of Montreal, on a scale corresponding with the magnitude and

necessities of the navigation below the city, and with the resources of the great West. Every year's experience shews more conclusively that Harbour improvements on such a scale are necessary, and that without them, the expenditure in the channel below will be almost wholly useless. Impressed with these convictions, the Commissioners, in December 1851, authorized Messrs. Gzowski & Keefer, Engineers, to survey and report upon the best means of providing such improvements, and especially to ascertain whether it was practicable to connect the Lachine Canal with Hoche-laga Bay. These Engineers reported against the latter project, and suggested, as a better means of giving increased facilities, sundry improvements, including the enclosing of that part of the St. Lawrence from the entrance of the Lachine Canal to Point St. Charles. This scheme of docks at Point St. Charles was approved by the then Harbour Commissioners (Messrs. Try, Marchand and Young), but was then, as now, opposed by a large number of the citizens in the eastern section of the city. Whilst the Commissioners, from having had the subject before them for years, and having frequently and anxiously discussed it in all its bearings, were prepared, at that period, to recommend and to push forward the improvements at the point named,—they considered it best that the scheme should remain merely *as a scheme*, for the consideration of the public, and especially of that portion of the citizens who would judge of its intrinsic merits in reference to the general interests of the city, and indeed of the Province at large, and not with reference merely to particular local interests.

But whilst thus anxious to afford time and opportunity to test the practicability of the scheme, the Commissioners did not fail to perceive that improvements in the Harbour might be made, if the limits of the Harbour could be extended. The limits of the Harbour on the city side extended only from the foot of the Lachine Canal to the Government Wharf at the Victoria Pier, but at the instance of the Commissioners those limits were extended by Act of the Legislature passed in 1849, so as to include the whole extent from the River St. Pierre to the Ruisseau Migeon, and thereby afford them opportunity of carrying out the desired im-

provements at such points within these enlarged limits as might be found best adapted for the interests of the Trade of the Port, and of the Province generally. By a Report dated 23rd April, 1857, Mr. Young, Chairman, again brought before the Commissioners the subject of these improvements, the necessity for which had become more evident by the increased size of the vessels coming to the Port, and especially by the line of Ocean Steamers requiring accommodation. The Commissioners ordered plans and estimates to be made shewing the nature and probable cost of improvements both at Hochelaga Bay and at Point St. Charles. These plans and estimates were made, and on the 24th April 1857, the Harbour Commissioners passed a resolution to the following effect :—

“That in view of the augmenting trade of the Port, and of the proximate completion of the 20-feet Channel in Lake St. Peter, the Board are of opinion that the time has arrived for taking into consideration the question of increasing the capacity of the Harbour; and that, in order to attract public attention to the subject, and to elicit an expression of public opinion, it is resolved that the Report this day handed in by Mr. Young be published, and the Plans of Docks prepared by Mr. Forsyth be left for public inspection in the Merchants’ Exchange.”

This resolution, it will be noticed, makes no reference to any particular site for the proposed works; although the merits of the various proposed sites were discussed at large in the Report referred to. The Board of Trade, by resolution passed at a meeting held in June, 1857, resolved :

“That the Council of the Board be instructed to suggest to the Harbour Commissioners the propriety of placing the whole subject of Harbour enlargement before two or more qualified Engineers, to obtain estimates, and an opinion as to the place where increased accommodation can be secured at the least cost and with the greatest facilities to the commerce of the Port.”

Acting upon this resolution the Commissioners secured the services of three distinguished Engineers from the United States, to whom the whole subject of the Harbour improvements was submitted for Report. In reference to the vexed question of site, the following were the only remarks made by the Commissioners in their letter of instructions to the Engineers.

"On the question of site there has been much public discussion. "It has been urged by some, that the improvements should be made "in or near Hochelaga Bay; by others that docks could be construct- "ed with advantage to the public at or near Viger Square; by others "that a dock could be made by enclosing the present Harbour; "while another party recommends that the space between Wind- "mill Point and Point St. Charles should be enclosed. On no one "of these schemes have the Harbour Commissioners any opinion "to offer. They desire to leave you at full liberty thoroughly to "investigate and report on what seems to you best calculated to "promote the general trade of the Province, believing that the true "interests of this Port will thereby be best secured."

They also caused the following advertisement to be inserted in several of the city newspapers:—

NOTICE.

"The Harbour Commissioners of Montreal have engaged the services of Messrs. Childe, McAlpine and Kirkwood, as a Board of Engineers to survey and report upon the best mode of obtaining increased accommodation in the Harbour of Montreal, request that all parties having any suggestions to offer on this important subject, may send the same in together with such Plans or other information as they may deem requisite in support of their views, so that the whole may be placed before the Board of Engineers for full consideration at their meeting on 2nd November next."

ALEX. CLERK, *Secretary.*

HARBOUR COMMISSIONERS' OFFICE, }
Montreal, Sept. 29th, 1857. }

It will be seen that the Commissioners, in the steps thus taken, took no advantage of their official position, to restrict the enquiries of the Engineers, or to force upon them particular opinions. They left the whole matter open, for the action of the Engineers. It may suit the purposes, and be consistent with the conduct of particular individuals, to mis-represent the conduct of the Commissioners, and assume to speak for the mass of the Citizens of Montreal, in so doing; but it is confidently submitted that the conduct of the Commissioners in acting as they did, must recommend itself to every unprejudiced mind. No excitement or contracted views of "vested rights" or local interests can prevent a full recognition of the perfect fairness of the Commissioners as evinced by

their official acts alluded to. It is matter of regret to the Commissioners, and of some surprise also, that the framers of the Petition should have felt themselves justified in the strictures they have deemed it proper to make.

The Report of the Engineers was made, and at a meeting of the Commissioners on the 1st April last, was unanimously approved by the Commissioners present, (His Honor the Mayor, and Messrs. Young and Whitney). A public meeting of the citizens, in reference to Harbor Improvements was, on the 17th day of May, called on the requisition of a number of influential gentlemen, chiefly from those interested in the eastern section of the city, but such, unfortunately, was the excitement and diversity of opinion, that no resolutions were passed. The resolutions intended to have been proposed for adoption by the gentlemen interested in the calling of the meeting were, however, next day published in the newspapers, and amongst others, a resolution favorable to the survey of a site for the docks, not surveyed nor considered previously. It was understood that the new site which had reference to the construction of Docks near the Grey Nunnery, would be likely to receive the support of many from the eastern section of the city, previously favorable to Docks at Hochelaga Bay. The Commissioners, therefore, invited the mover and seconder of that resolution to a conference, when it was deemed advisable to call together a number of gentlemen interested in the eastern section of the city, and opposed to the opinions of the Harbour Commissioners as to the site of the works. This meeting was held in the Harbour Office on the 24th day of May, and it was understood as the result of the meeting that the Harbour Commissioners should get the new site surveyed by some competent Engineer, to be suggested by the Committee of the gentlemen present, and have a report made on such site. It was also understood that the Commissioners, in the Draft of a Bill for Harbor Improvements, which they were to submit to be introduced into the House of Assembly, should not name any particular locality in the Harbour for the site of the works.

In the draft of Bill therefore so submitted, and read a first time on the 1st June, inst., are the following clauses :

"I. The Harbour Commissioners of Montreal are hereby authorized to erect, construct, and maintain, new docks, wharves, basins, with a proper canal for the supply thereof with water, and all other works and erections for the convenient use thereof, according to such plans and on such site and locality within the City or Harbour of Montreal, as may be determined, fixed and approved of by the Governor in Council; and such plans, when signed and certified by the Provincial Secretary, shall be, to all intents and purposes, of the same effect as if prescribed by this Act and appended to and formally incorporated into the same: Provided nevertheless, that deviations or alterations from or in the said plans may be directed and approved by the Governor in Council, or such additional plans may be directed, made, and approved of as aforesaid, as may be found necessary for better carrying out the works contemplated. *n*

"II. So soon as a copy of the said plans, certified as aforesaid, shall have been deposited in the office of the said Harbour Commissioners, the said Harbour Commissioners and their successors in office shall have full power and authority, and it shall be their duty, to carry the said plans into effect: And for all and every the purposes of the said improvements and works, shall have power to receive, take, and hold all voluntary grants or donations of land, to purchase from any person, corporation or community, and to hold any land or other property for the construction, maintenance, or use of the said docks, wharves, basins, canal, and other works necessary for the trade of the Harbour, and to build *w*arehouses, grain elevators or hydraulic cranes,— *L*
 "to lease and rent, for manufacturing purposes, any surplus water,—
 "to agree with any owner of land or real property as to the price and value of such land or property, and as to compensation to such owner or other parties interested for damages sustained by reason of said work, &c., &c."

It may now be seen with what view the framers of the Petition represent the action of the Harbour Commissioners as "having submitted to the Government, maps, plans, and Engineers Reports, indicating Point St. Charles as a fit and proper place for the construction of such docks," referring to those mentioned in

the "Act to provide for the further improvement of the Harbour of Montreal," and praying that "the project of the Harbour Commissioners for constructing docks at Point St. Charles, may not be favourably entertained;" that the "project of a system of Docks at Point St. Charles, so persistently urged by the Harbour Commissioners," &c., as if Harbour Commissioners had broken faith with the Committee. The simple fact is, that the Harbour Commissioners made no plans, never alluded to, or mentioned Point St. Charles in the draft of Bill submitted. They sent to Government the plans and maps of the American Engineers, forming part of their Report, in which plans, the docks at *Hochelaga Bay* as well as at Point St. Charles are laid down.

In a letter also of date the 21st day of May last, addressed to you, relative to the assumption, by Government, of the Debt incurred for the deepening of Lake St. Peter, the Commissioners shew the same desire to give the proposed new site the same fair and impartial consideration, as was given to the Scheme for Docks at *Hochelaga Bay*.

In that letter they state :—

"But since the decision of the Board of Trade, a new site has been proposed for the construction of docks, which is now under investigation, and will be, no doubt, surveyed and reported on by a competent Engineer. Pending this investigation, the Harbour Commissioners do not desire to press the claims of any particular site, in any Bill which the Government may be pleased to introduce to the Législature, providing for increased harbour accommodation, but to leave the question of site an open one until further information enables them to decide on the best and most advisable locality."

The framers of the Petition further state, "that in January, 1854, the Harbour Commissioners submitted the same scheme of Docks at Point St. Charles, to the test of public opinion when it was unanimously rejected by the Citizens of Montreal, specially convened for that purpose." The facts are simply these, that a meeting was called by the parties interested in condemning the action of the Harbour Commissioners, in the absence of the Chairman of the Commissioners, and without any one

favorable to the views of the Commissioners being allowed to speak.

The framers of the Petition further say "that the views of the Citizens have often been solemnly and publicly expressed as to the imperative necessity of improving the present Harbour to its fullest extent and capacity." It is submitted, that the two meetings above referred to, scarcely sustain the assertion, whilst it is a matter of fact, and the Commissioners think it right to mention it, that notwithstanding the instructions given to the Engineers and the public advertisement referred to, *not a single letter, petition, suggestion, or ~~any~~ representation was ever laid before the Commissioners or submitted to the Engineers*, who might, therefore, not have been informed of the precise views entertained by the supporters of Docks at Hochelaga Bay, had the Commissioners not deemed it their duty to bring these views under the notice of the Engineers, from a collection of various letters published in the newspapers by individual writers, favorable to Docks at Hochelaga Bay, and opposed to the views of the Commissioners.

The conduct of the Harbour Commissioners, in this respect, must therefore recommend itself to the minds of all who are disposed to judge them by their acts, and not from assertions wholly unsupported by facts.

It may further be stated that the only representation or petition in reference to Harbour Improvements laid before the Commissioners since the year 1845, was contained in a petition, dated March, 1852, from Messrs. Molson and others, calling attention to the necessity of a wharf at the Current St. Mary, near the foot of Monarque Street. This wharf was at once constructed; at a place too, where it could not have been constructed by the Harbour Commissioners, but for the extension of the limits of the Harbour above referred to.

It is also a fact, which will be verified by the records of the Harbour Commissioners, that since 1845, all new works have been constructed to the *Eastward* of the Island wharf, and that at a cost exceeding £38,000. Since 1850, when the improvement of the Navigation in Lake St. Peter was commenced by

the Commissioners, a powerful Dredge, besides a Spoon Dredge, has been kept in constant operation in improving the Harbour, and especially the channel leading into it. Divers with a diving apparatus, and boats with shears, have been employed in lifting enormous boulders which impeded the navigation. Shoals, where previously there was only four feet of water below the Island Wharf, are now adapted, by the dredging referred to, for vessels drawing 12 feet at lowest water. Berths are now occupied by ocean steamers and sailing vessels, drawing 18 feet of water, where before there was only 14 feet. In fact every possible exertion has been made by the commissioners to improve the present harbour, in direct contradiction to the allegation hazarded by the framers of the petition. The evident advantage to the trade of the Province, and particularly of Montreal, induced the Commissioners to make every effort to accommodate the ocean steamers at this Port. Without the exertions of the Commissioners in the improvement of the lake and river these fine vessels could not have come to Montreal, nor could they have found berths in the Harbour. The length of these vessels, and the fact that the semi-monthly line will next season be a weekly one, demanded the most serious attention of the trade, and the Commissioners felt, that they would have been wanting in their duty, had they not urged, as they have done, the necessity of further accommodation and facilities for that important branch of our trade. Wharves for these vessels were constructed at Hochelaga Bay, at the instance and by the advice of the agents of the steamers. Experience, however, demonstrated that that point was too distant from the business part of the city; a conference was had, during last season, with the agents, as to the means by which their present berths could be increased in size by cutting off a portion of Nelson Pier and filling in an adjoining Basin, so that a total length of wharfage of 740 feet could be obtained. To carry out this project, it was necessary to provide berths for sailing vessels elsewhere, and it was decided some months ago, to construct a wharf below the Victoria Pier as far down as the Military Hospital, to an extent of some 1600 feet, in a depth of water of 10 feet, so as to admit of the Commissioners removing the whole of the trade now carried on in deals, lumber,

and firewood to that position, the intention of the Commissioners being, so soon as the present wharves could be relieved, gradually to deepen and improve the harbour for vessels from sea of deep draught. It is evident that for the local trade of the port, wharves must continue to be erected in an easterly direction, and below the Lachine Canal; but it would be absurd, even were it practicable, to deepen the whole Harbour, so as to adapt the whole of it for vessels drawing 20 feet. A large space in the harbour is now occupied, and must continue to be occupied, by steamers and sailing vessels trading with various localities on the St. Lawrence and its tributaries. These vessels seldom draw over 11 feet, and must have a position convenient to the markets. The Bonsecours Market is the place where such vessels must resort, and the Bonsecours Basin is *now* on market days crowded to inconvenience. The Commissioners therefore deemed that they were acting on a correct policy, in authorising the construction of the proposed new pier in that basin, to give increased accommodation for that trade. When this is completed there will be in no place less than 12 feet of water, while, at the end of the wharf, berths will be obtained for two vessels drawing 14 feet. To deepen and wharf the *whole* of that part of the harbour, as is proposed by the petitioners, would cost a sum of £93,000, while a large part of the space is the very best site for vessels which do not require it to be deepened. The Committee of gentlemen above referred to, now in conference with the Commissioners, will no doubt agree upon the best site for an increase of 20 feet berths, and should these require to be increased, either for ocean steamers or sailing vessels drawing 20 feet, it is quite easy to do so, by the deepening of the space below Victoria Pier into deep water, and extending at the same time the wharves *now* proposed to be constructed for the trade in lumber. By these explanations it will be seen how utterly fallacious are the statements set forth in the petition, "*that the improvements of the present Harbour have been totally disregarded by the Harbour Commissioners.*"

"The Petitioners further pray that measures be taken for amending the laws under which the Harbour Commissioners are appointed, as will afford the citizens a larger voice in the

" constitution of that body, and that when such reorganisation takes place, the Harbour Trust, be like all other public bodies, " held to render a yearly account to the Government." In reference to this statement, the Commissioners would only observe, that up to 1854, the Corporation of the Harbour was composed of three Commissioners, named by His Excellency the Governor General. Since that period the citizens generally have been represented through His Worship the Mayor, and the Mercantile body through the President of the Board of Trade, the three Commissioners being still named by the Government.

Those acquainted with the subject are aware that this change *was proposed by the then Harbour Commissioners themselves, and was carried into effect by the Government and Legislature at their request.* Allusion is made to this point now for the purpose simply of directing attention to the unworthy insinuations thrown out by the framers of the petition, which the Commissioners are convinced, would not be endorsed by any considerable number of their fellow citizens.

As to the concluding allegation of the petition " that the " Harbour Trust be like all other public bodies held to furnish a " yearly account to the Government," the same remarks will apply. It may be added, that the accounts of the Montreal Harbour Trust have been regularly sent to the Government, and will, in their arrangement and clearness, bear the closest scrutiny.

It is much to be regretted that the statements in the petition should have been such as to call for the notice of the Commissioners, and that the framers of it, did not take more pains in inquiring into the real facts before venturing to put their views before the Legislature in such a form. There are sufficient difficulties connected with the subject of the Harbour improvements, without increasing them by gratuitous and unfounded charges against the Commissioners of totally disregarding their duty.

They are conscious of having honestly endeavored, in the discharge of their very onerous and important duties, to have the best site selected for the *Docks*. They have kept back no view of the case from the various Engineers who have successively reported on this important and difficult question. They are prepared in good

faith to submit the question of the proposed new site to the consideration and report of disinterested and competent Engineers, and that the whole matter be decided by the Government. They are satisfied that the improvements they seek to urge forward can be made without increasing the burdens on the trade of the port beyond the rate of dues that have been charged in the Harbour, were it relieved as they respectively have on several occasions submitted it ought to be, from the debt incurred in improving the Channel of Navigation below the city; that the facilities which exist in receiving and delivering grain and other produce by elevators at American Ports, tend powerfully to attract trade into American Canals, and over American railways, and that such improvements cannot be made on the margin of the present Harbour without the same being destroyed by ice;—that docks inland at some point are necessary for the convenience of the transit and foreign trade;—that a vast saving could thus be effected on the present charges on produce coming to the Lower St. Lawrence;—and that in this saving, every agriculturalist in the Province has a direct and plain interest, inasmuch as instead of a vessel being delayed in the Harbour some eight or ten days in discharging cargo, she might with the facilities in existence in many of the American ports, be discharged in a few hours;—that, for want of these facilities, trade is attracted into channels less favorable by nature, but better developed than that of the St. Lawrence; as is evident from the fact that only ten per cent. of the cereals of the West come to Lower Canada, while 90 per cent. passes through American Channels to the Eastern States, thereby giving full employment and large revenues to the State of New York from its Canals and Railways, while Canadian Canals and Railways are almost unemployed, and are annually a heavy Tax upon the Province; that even with ocean freights, 100 per cent. higher at Montreal than at New York our imports are increasing, thus plainly indicating what might be accomplished were our internal channels of navigation fully developed.

They would respectfully submit further, that the Bill referred to, if passed into a law, will afford ample guarantee that the fullest investigation may be made into the best and most available

on the money

site for the works referred to, and this site may be settled by the Government with a full knowledge of all the facts, and so as most effectually to promote the interest of the City and of the trade of the Province.

JOHN YOUNG,

Chairman Harbour Commissioners.

ERRATA.

- ✓ Page 7, Line 16, for *have*, read *having*.
- ✓ " 9, " 14, for *carrying*, read *carrying*.
- ✓ " 9, " 27, for *wharehouses*, read *warehouses*.
- ✓ " 11, " 11, for *misrepresentations*, read *representations*.
- ✓ " 15, " 10, for *elevator*, read *elevators*.
- ✓ " 15, " 31, after the word "*freights*," read "*on the average*."

